



PB99-160053

Southwest Region University Transportation Center

An Evaluation of Jitney Services as an Option For Non-Urban and Rural Applications

SWUTC/99/472840-00045-1

REPRODUCED BY: **NTIS**
U.S. Department of Commerce
National Technical Information Service
Springfield, Virginia 22161



**Center for Transportation Training and Research
Texas Southern University
3100 Cleburne Avenue
Houston, Texas 77004**

1. Report No. SWUTC/99/472840-00045-1		2. Government Accession No.		3. Recipient's Catalog No.	
4. Title and Subtitle An Evaluation of Jitney Services as an Option for Non-Urban and Rural Application				5. Report Date May 1999	
				6. Performing Organization Code	
7. Author(s) Ronald Goodwin				8. Performing Organization Report No. 472840-00045-1	
9. Performing Organization Name and Address Center for Transportation Training and Research Texas Southern University 3100 Cleburne Avenue Houston, TX 77004				10. Work Unit No. (TRAIS)	
				11. Contract or Grant No. DTOS95-G-0006	
12. Sponsoring Agency Name and Address Southwest Region University Transportation Center Texas Transportation Institute The Texas A&M University System College Station, Texas 77843-3135				13. Type of Report and Period Covered	
				14. Sponsoring Agency Code	
15. Supplementary Notes Supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation, University Transportation Centers Program					
16. Abstract <p>The issues of mobility in minority and rural communities are continuing to play major roles in the decision making of transit officials. The introduction of the jitney in 1916 had an immediate impact on urban mobility. So prevalent was that impact, that by the early 1920s transit officials sought ways to legislate jitneys out of existence. They succeeded. However, the reappearance of jitneys demands a closer evaluation of the urban mobility and the applicability of the potential applications of jitneys. The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County sponsors a jitney program, known as FasTrak, operating along a single corridor in southwest Houston. An evaluation of this service will determine its usefulness to the population it serves, as well as other potential applications in urban and rural communities.</p>					
17. Key Words Jitneys, Non-Urban Services, Rural Services			18. Distribution Statement No Restrictions. This document is available to the public through NTIS: National Technical Information Service 5285 Port Royal Road Springfield, Virginia 22161		
19. Security Classif.(of this report) Unclassified		20. Security Classif.(of this page) Unclassified		21. No. of Pages 38	
				22. Price	

**AN EVALUATION OF JITNEY SERVICES AS AN OPTION
FOR NON-URBAN AND RURAL APPLICATIONS**

by

Ronald Goodwin

Research Report SWUTC/99/472840-00045-1

Southwest Region University Transportation Center
Center for Transportation Training and Research
Texas Southern University
3100 Cleburne
Houston, TX 77004

May 1999

DISCLAIMER

The contents of this report reflect the views of the authors, who are responsible for the facts and the accuracy of the information presented herein. This document is disseminated under the sponsorship of the Department of Transportation University Transportation Centers Program, in the interest of information exchange. The U.S. Government assumes no liability for the contents or use thereof.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Support was provided by a grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation, University Transportation Centers Program to the Southwest Region University Transportation Center. The Center would also like to acknowledge Jim DePitts of Houston METRO for his assistance in providing data and information.

PROTECTED UNDER INTERNATIONAL COPYRIGHT
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
NATIONAL TECHNICAL INFORMATION SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

ABSTRACT

The issues of mobility in minority and rural communities are continuing to play major roles in the decision making of transit officials. The introduction of the jitney in 1916 had an immediate impact on urban mobility. So prevalent was that impact that by the early 1920s transit officials sought ways to legislate jitneys out of existence. They succeeded. However, the reappearance of jitneys demands a closer evaluation of the urban mobility and the applicability of the potential applications of jitneys. The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County sponsors a jitney program, known as FasTrak, operating along a single corridor in southwest Houston. An evaluation of this service will determine its usefulness to the population it serves, as well as other potential applications in urban and rural communities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the financial support of Houston METRO and the Houston City Council, a jitney provider began operations along Westheimer, west of Loop 610, one of the busiest urban corridors in the state. Unfortunately, the jitney operator was only able to provide jitney services for two months, May and June of 1995. Even with the financial commitment from Metro in the form of rider subsidies, the operator suffered great financial hardships. The total numbers of trips increased by 2,146 as did the total numbers of hours the jitneys operated, from 835 to 1,348. After one month of operations the provider increased the total numbers of miles traveled from 12,707 to 21,489. This rapid growth in miles traveled and hours operated may have contributed to the demise of the service.

The next contractor selected to provide jitney services chose a corridor along Bellaire street between the Bellaire Transit Center west to Dairy Ashford and/or Cook Roads. This jitney operator appears to be successful, financially and in terms of customer satisfaction. Some of the findings from a Houston METRO survey of the jitney's customers indicate extreme satisfaction with the route and the current service provided. Additional findings from the Bellaire corridor include: A majority of the users of FasTrak are of minority descent (74% Hispanic, and 25% African American). The service has gained ridership over the last six months (59% increase) while only making minimal increases over the last six months in the average monthly total hours of operations (12% increase) and the average monthly total trips made (10% increase). Fifty-six percent of the FasTrak patrons are women, with the average age being 24 years old, and from households classified as *low income*. Sixty-two percent of the FasTrak patrons were *completely satisfied* with the current service. The greatest majority (13%) of FasTrak users list their destination as the Texas Medical Center.

After evaluation of the existing data and the positive increase in ridership during the reporting period, the current jitney/FasTrak service is providing the desired levels of increased mobility. The examination of current jitney-type services indicates a commonality between the Bellaire corridor and rural communities. Where there is a limited, or defined corridor, with minimal trip distances, generally three to five miles, with a major terminus, such as a park and ride facility or employment center, as a connector to existing public transit service, the jitney would probably be successful. In none of the existing studies do jitney services replace an existing public transit route(s), but instead is used as an augmentation device.

The possibility of contracting with an existing taxi service is also an option in rural and non-urban, as well as many suburban areas. If the regional transit authority, or regional council of governments, is capable of providing some form of subsidy to a taxi company, one or two taxis dedicated to daily jitney services would probably cause minimal disruption to the normal taxi business. This may be the preferred option in rural areas. However, a pilot project should be initiated to determine its full potential and develop criteria and measures for successfulness.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
BACKGROUND.....	3
THE STREET CAR VERSUS THE JITNEY.....	6
THE END OF JITNEY OPERATION IN HOUSTON.....	12
EVALUATION OF CURRENT JITNEY SERVICE.....	15
FASTRAK SURVEY RESULTS	17
FASTRAK DATA ANALYSIS	20
JITNEY-TYPE TRANSPORTATION NATIONWIDE.....	22
FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS	25
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	29

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE		PAGE
FIGURE 1.	WEEKEND AND WEEKDAY JITNEY RIDERSHIP FOR MAY AND JUNE 1995.....	15
FIGURE 2.	RACIAL COMPOSITION OF BELLAIRE FASTRAK SEPT. 1996 – JUNE 1997	18
FIGURE 3.	CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH FASTRAK SERVICES	20

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
TABLE 1.	JITNEY RIDERSHIP INFORMATION.....17

INTRODUCTION

Many transportation observers advocate and support the use of jitney services in urban areas and believe that this hybrid transportation form would be successful in Houston. The objective would not be to replace existing public transit routes operated by the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (Houston METRO), but serve as an augmentation device and/or feeder system to the existing public transit network. Studies of other jitney services indicate a high degree of success when used in conjunction with another transportation service.

While the use of jitneys may seem to be a revolutionary idea for a city with hundreds of miles of highways and a public transit system that is one of the best in the country. But is it really *that* revolutionary? From 1914 to 1924 jitneys operated along Houston's streets, providing a needed service for the City's minority community, too often prohibited from full access of the local streetcars due to existing Jim Crow laws. Jitneys were subsequently put out of business by City ordinance in 1924 after the streetcar company exerted pressure on Houston's city council members, fearing competition from aggressive minority entrepreneurs.

The demise of the jitneys in 1924, and the streetcars a few years later, gave way to the new technology of the time-bus transit. Later attempts to revive jitney operations as a companion to bus transportation were

unsuccessful. However, in June of 1995, the Houston city council approved guidelines for the limited use of jitneys along certain corridors within the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County's (Houston METRO) service area. Currently there is only one jitney provider operating legally in the city.¹

This research will evaluate the existing jitney service, and analyze other jitney operations to determine the usefulness and/or appropriateness to non-urban or rural communities. The concepts of *Livable Communities* and President Clinton's *welfare-to-work* initiatives involve increasing the mobility of those who either cannot afford a private automobile or who choose not to use one for a portion of their commute trips. Since the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (Houston METRO) subsidizes the current jitney operator, the evaluation will mainly focus on weekday ridership figures for the period of September 1996 to July 1997. The impacts made by the increased mobility of jitneys in minority communities cannot be understated. The information gained will provide decision makers the tools necessary to evaluate the potential uses of jitney operations in areas that desire additional mobility in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

¹ It is rumored that there may be several renegade jitney operators that provide limited transportation services, but cannot afford to pay the fees or insurance requirements mandated by the Houston city council.

BACKGROUND

Public transportation in this country has predominately consisted of bus fleets operating on fixed routes and schedules since the mid 1920's. However, before the development of organized bus service, streetcars shared the public transit scene with entrepreneurs who utilized their privately owned automobiles to transport passengers along certain corridors in many major US cities. While the streetcars clearly operated along a fixed route, jitneys were able to slightly vary their routes to accommodate passengers. The earliest recorded use of jitneys, originally a slang term for a nickel, appears in 1914-15 and was well received by transit patrons while posing a real threat to owners of the streetcar companies.² By charging only 5 cents a ride, jitney operators were able to secure profits without incurring much overhead. A mini "revolution" ensued in the used car markets across the country, supported by the Standard Oil company's desire to increase gasoline revenues.³ Any entrepreneur with \$15 per month, the cost to rent a used car, could transport seven to eight passengers, while the cost of gasoline at the time was only a "...fraction of a cent per mile."⁴

Cities along the west coast were the first to experience the introduction of jitneys and their immediate impacts on streetcar businesses. In Seattle, the

² Sydney Strong, "A Nickel A Ride - When the Jitney Comes to Town", The Survey, March 13, 1915, p 647.

³ _____, "Growth of the 'Jitney' Bus Business", The Literary Digest, February 27, 1915, p 434.

jitney services mirrored the fixed routes of the streetcars and went as far as picking up passengers from the streetcar platforms.⁵ By February of 1915, there were 500 jitneys in operation on Seattle's streets. Strong (1915) reported on the financial successes of these hybrids when he stated: "The average receipts of a jitney are \$8 a day, which means that the jitneys of Seattle carry about 80,000 passengers daily, receiving for the service \$4,000 or over \$1 million a year."⁶ This direct challenge to the city's streetcar system, whose investment in streets, rail, and cars, was substantially greater than those of the jitney owners, caused Seattle's public officials great concern.

Likewise, in San Francisco, the local streetcar company suffered a loss in receipts of \$9,500 during the first month jitneys began operation in that city.⁷ In January of 1915, Los Angeles had over 1,000 jitneys and Portland had just over 75 jitneys in operation, with daily receipts of \$8,400 and \$600, respectively.⁸ Facing the possibility of extinction, the streetcar companies decided the only way to combat the jitney challenge was to influence local governments to tax and regulate the jitney out of existence.

In Houston, the origins of the streetcars began shortly after the Civil War. Single cars pulled by mules began transportation services in the early 1870's. The competition for transit patrons came to a temporary end when Galveston native William Sinclair purchased the existing streetcar companies

⁴ ____, "The Jitney Bus", The Nation, February 4, 1915, p 142.

⁵ Sydney Strong, "A Nickel A Ride - When the Jitney Comes to Town", The Survey, March 13, 1915, p 647.

⁶ IBID.

⁷ The Literary Digest, p 434

and merged them under the name Houston City Street Railway Company (HCSRC).⁹ Sinclair, who also owned and operated a similar traction company in Galveston, began the transfer of ownership of local utility companies to outside investors.¹⁰ Sinclair enjoyed his monopoly of Houston's streetcar business for a profitable six years. Then, in March of 1889, William Boyd created the Bayou City Street Railway Company, and "the battle for the streets of Houston began."¹¹ HCSRC moved the battle from the streets to the courtroom in an attempt to prevent Boyd from laying tracks for a new Congress street line. The injunction failed, and Boyd began laying over sixteen miles of new tracks. The next year (1890) witnessed outside investors again purchasing local utilities, as E.A. Allen and O.M. Carter, representing a coalition from Nebraska, purchased both competing lines, and began the system wide conversion to electric power. The streetcar system was again sold in 1897 to Owen D. Young of Boston, on behalf of the Stone and Webster syndicate in 1897, and the name was changed to the Houston Electric Street Railway Company.

The mobility between Houston and Galveston increased as the interurban street rail system was introduced in 1903, and by 1905 the Galveston-Houston Electric Railway Company (G.H.E.) was formed. Peter Papademetriou, in his examination of the history of Houston's transportation systems stated:

⁸ IBID, p 302.

⁹ Peter Papademetriou, Transportation and Urban Development in Houston, 1830-1980, Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, 1982, p 20.

¹⁰ Harold L. Platt, City Building in the New South: The Growth of Public Services in Houston, Texas, 1830-1910, 1983, p 92.

However, the Stone and Webster syndicate, now in control of the Houston Electric Company, and having acquired the Galveston Electric Company in 1905, secured control of the G.H.E. on June 10, 1906, as a way of consolidating their holdings by virtue of completion of the third line under construction. The new route ran via Genoa, Webster, League City, Dickinson, and LaMarque, and there was almost a total lack of curves and grades which facilitated even more rapid transit.¹²

The Streetcar versus the Jitney

The appearance of jitneys in Houston, in 1914, coincided with that of the west coast, and had the same impacts. In 1919, Luke Bradley, vice president of the Houston Electric Company reported a loss of over \$400,000 a year due to the loss of passengers to the jitney service, thus preventing the Company from the planned expansions and maintenance of the existing city lines.¹³ "By 1923, jitneys were carrying more than 8,000 riders daily, and transit service had become so erratic that a citizens' committee was formed to secure improvements."¹⁴

The African-American community welcomed the transportation services provided by the jitneys because of the segregated operating practices of the streetcar operators, which, by law, required the use of a removable screen to separate passengers of different races. In 1904 a city ordinance provided that

¹¹ Platt, 1983, p 132.

¹² Papademetriou, 1982, p 27.

¹³ David G. McComb, *Houston: The Bayou City*, University of Texas Press: Austin and London, 1969, p 107.

¹⁴ Ibid, p 28.

anyone violating the "separate but equal" provisions would be charged with a misdemeanor.¹⁵ The Black community boycotted the streetcar company to protest the discourteous treatment often endured at the hands of streetcar conductors. The affordable fares and increased mobility in the minority community provided improved access to jobs and social services that were unattainable prior to the jitneys' arrival. African-Americans also found few barriers to entering the jitney business, and soon became a visible part of Houston transportation networks. In their study of the Black jitney operators, August Meier and Elliott Rudwick noted the following:

Because of the deteriorating conditions [within the Black political situation], there had been a shift in emphasis from agitation and politics to economic advancement, self-help, and racial solidarity, often coupled with a philosophy of accommodation. The development of transportation companies, therefore, functioned in three ways: as a means of protesting against discrimination, as a fulfillment of the dream of creating substantial Negro business by an appeal to racial solidarity, and-hopefully-as a practical solution to the transportation problems faced by the masses of boycotting Negroes.¹⁶

Consequently, the Black owned and operated jitneys soon became common place on the city streets, as much of their operation centered on the mobility of the Black community. Due to diminishing profit returns, the Houston Electric Company made a formal request to the Houston City Council to prohibit operation of jitney services on streetcar lines and within two blocks

¹⁵ Frances Dressman, "Yes, We Have No Jitneys!" Transportation Issues in Houston's Black Community, 1914-1924", Houston Review Index, volume ix(2), p 71.

of these streets themselves.¹⁷ The streetcar company was unable to compete with the jitneys' lower fares, and flexible routes and schedules. Bradley reiterated his position that his traction company could not compete with the jitney services unless fares were increased, or the city would face a reduction in streetcar services and street maintenance.¹⁸ Prior to a general election vote on November 7, 1922, Mayor Oscar Holcombe declared the conflict between jitney and streetcar services over. However, the city council accepted a motion to reduce the number of jitneys operating in Houston in return for the Houston Electric Company's promise to resume street improvements.

It was reported that the Mayor and streetcar company had reached a compromise where forty jitneys would permanently be removed from Houston's streets, reducing the total number of jitneys to 150, although the specific jitney lines were not identified.¹⁹ The African-American community as well as the Black jitney operators soon realized this compromise meant the removal of the predominately Black jitney route, the San Felipe Line. On November 1, 1922, 11 of the 23 jitneys on the San Felipe Line were ordered out of service by January of 1923. Clifton Richardson, editor of the *Houston Informer*, was outraged. In his editorial he declared: "The action of the city council of Houston in abolishing ...the San Felipe Line, while only reducing the number of autos on the white lines is class legislation of the grossest type and shows the

¹⁶ August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Along Color Lines: Explorations in the Black Experience*, Urbana: Illinois, 1976, p 274.

¹⁷ Dressman, p 75.

¹⁸ *Houston Press*, September, 4, 1922.

¹⁹ *Houston Post*, October 15-17, 1922.

sad and impotent plight of the man or race without a vote." and "Why make the San Felipe jitney line, operated almost, if not entirely, by colored citizens and taxpayers, the scape goat?"²⁰ One of Houston's other mainstream newspapers, the *Houston Press*, noted that the affected jitney lines on San Felipe were the "Negro" lines, and that the reduction was necessary so "The streetcar company, under terms of the agreement, has continued its expansion program."²¹

Richardson believed the San Felipe Lines were sacrificed because the Black jitney operators were easy prey to the political dealings of Houston's City Council and the traction company. In January 1923, he continued to use his editorial to alert his readers of the discriminatory actions of the city council and stated: "The white jitney lines were not affected in the least, yet every colored man's car was lifted soul and body and shunted off the line..."²²

Still not satisfied with the initial reduction in jitney operators, The Houston Electric Company further coerced the city council to put the issue of complete removal of all jitney lines to a vote on June 9, 1923. This issue did not generate much interest from the African-American community since the struggle was viewed as being between the white traction company and the white jitney operators.²³ However, on the day of the election Richardson began an aggressive assault on the white jitney operators, and vehemently supported the traction company. This shift in Richardson's position was influenced by the lack of support provided by the white jitney owners when the San Felipe Lines

²⁰ *Houston Informer*, November 11, 1922.

²¹ *Houston Press*, November 2, 1922.

²² *Houston Informer*, January 6, 1923.

were under attack. Threatened with new legislation ending their businesses, the white jitney operators sought support from the African-American community by offering what Richardson considered false hope for the re-establishment of the San Felipe Lines.²⁴

Cognizant of the past discriminatory practices of the traction company, Richardson wrote: "Between the streetcars and jitneys, which gives employment to our people?", and "The *Informer* takes this position mindful of the fact that our race does not always get a fair and square deal from the traction company's employees, but the present management has made every effort to remedy this evil and it can be said to their credit that there is not nearly as much trouble between car crews and colored passengers as in days gone by."²⁵ The results of the election favored the white jitney operators by a margin of 1,100 votes, with half of the Black votes cast in favor of the jitneys. However, the Black San Felipe Lines did not reappear.²⁶

Still, the Houston Electric Company would not be satisfied until all jitneys were abolished in Houston. A transportation consultant issued a report stating that the streetcar company was being managed efficiently, but reemphasized that as long as jitneys remained, the fight would continue.²⁷ A citizen's committee, headed by A.S. Moody coordinated a plan where the traction company would resume its street improvements and withdraw a plan

²³ Ibid, June 2, 1923.

²⁴ Ibid, June 9, 1923.

²⁵ Ibid, June 9, 1923.

²⁶ Dressman, p 78.

²⁷ Ibid, p 78.

for increased fares in exchange for the City Council's support in completely abolishing jitney service. A second public vote was then scheduled for January 1924.²⁸

Beginning six weeks prior to the election, Richardson began a determined campaign in support of the traction company, believing they would help provide effective transportation in a growing city. Richardson also believed that the competition between jitneys and streetcars would lead to inadequate transportation facilities.²⁹ Stressing that no jitneys in Houston are operated by African-Americans, and the fact that:

"...white jitney owners ditched their colored brother and publicly stated that they were not concerned in the least in the re-establishment of the colored line in the Fourth Ward. Is there any colored man, woman or child that could so easily forget this unkindly cut and stab in the back? They employ no colored man, not even one to wash polish and grease their flivvers; we can not ride in them for love nor money, and the owners and operators of these white lines care about as much for us as the devil does for holy water or a Spanish bull does for a red flannel cloth."³⁰

Richardson further urged the Black community to beware of promises of the return of the San Felipe Line as "...pure poppy-cock and mere political palaver."³¹

²⁸ Ibid, p 79.

²⁹ *Houston Informer*, December, 15, 1923.

³⁰ *Houston Informer*, January 5, 1924.

³¹ Ibid.

The main issue of Richardson's editorial attacks stemmed from the fact that he perceived that the Houston Electric Company conspired with the white jitney operators to put the Black jitney owners out of business, effectively preventing the Black community from the only non-discriminatory transportation system available.³² Richardson stated in an editorial: "*The Informer* is unable to see what benefit will accrue to our social group by the retention of these white jitneys."³³ Richardson's championing of the Houston Electric Company lead to editorials and articles proclaiming the benefits received by the community because of the streetcar company. Those benefits came in the form of salaries for their employed African-American workers and the improvements made to urban streets.

The End of Jitney Operations in Houston

When the votes were counted after that January 1924 election, and all jitney operators were voted out of existence, Richardson was elated. He stated in his next editorial: "Aside from the decisive licking administered the white jitneys in last Saturday's election...the part that the colored voters of the city played in the election is not only an encouraging sign, but also a redeeming one." Richardson now felt vindicated by what he felt was the lack of support from the white jitney operators when the San Felipe Lines were under a combined attack from the City Council and the streetcar company. He further encouraged the streetcar company to ensure that all passengers are treated the

³² Dressman, p 79.

same, and that future expansions of the streetcar line would benefit outlying minority communities.³⁴ However, segregation in Houston's transportation systems continued. When buses were introduced to mass transit in April 1924, African-Americans were not allowed transport until 1932.³⁵

The jitney was easy to dispose of, but it took a few more years before buses completely dominated the mass transit landscape. The Houston Electric Company's slow integration of buses with streetcars eventually ended the streetcar's reign in Houston as well. The Houston Electric Company retired the last remaining streetcar on June 7, 1940.³⁶

Did Richardson's editorial campaign have an influence upon the City Council in supporting the Houston Electric Company versus the jitney operators? It does not appear so. The City Council recognized the contributions made by the streetcar company to the local infrastructure to a growing Houston. The threat to reduce streetcar services and abandon scheduled street improvements appears to be the only factor considered by the City Council. As a small business enterprise, jitneys would not adequately serve Houston's rapidly growing urban area, as new technology and big business would continue to influence societal changes.³⁷

Did Richardson's editorial campaign have an influence upon the African-American community? Without accurate figures of the *Informer's* circulation in

³³ *Houston Informer*, January 19, 1924.

³⁴ *Houston Informer*, January 26, 1924.

³⁵ Dressman, p 81, *Houston Chronicle*, June 7, 1940.

³⁶ *Houston Chronicle*, June 7, 1940.

³⁷ Dressman, p 80.

1923-1924, it would be difficult to determine its readership within the Black community or the city as a whole. However, Richardson's *Informer* "...urged, coaxed and reasoned with our people to go to the polls and vote...", and "In the five city precincts where colored people vote in large numbers...the jitneys were defeated at the ratio of 3 to 1, 877 voting for the ordinance abolishing the white jitneys and 284 for their retention."³⁸ In the previous jitney election, these same five precincts voted 498 in favor of the jitneys, and 418 votes against. A margin of plus 80. "Not only did the jitneymen lose 214 votes in these precincts in the recent election, but 459 more people voted for the jitneys' abolition last Saturday than voted on June 9, 1923."³⁹

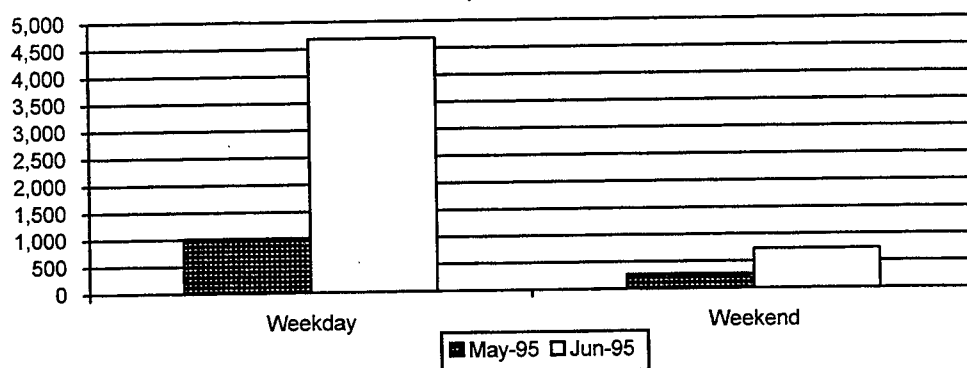
³⁸ *Houston Informer*, January 26, 1924.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

EVALUATION OF CURRENT JITNEY SERVICES

With the financial support of Houston METRO, the initial jitney provider began operations along Westheimer, west of Loop 610, one of the busiest urban corridors in the state. Unfortunately, the jitney operator was only able to provide jitney services for two months, May and June of 1995, even with the financial commitment from Metro in the form of rider subsidies. The weekday and weekend riderships are shown in figure 1. The total numbers of trips increased by 2,146 as did the total numbers of hours the jitneys operated, from 835 to 1,348. After one month of operations the provider increased the total numbers of miles traveled from 12,707 to 21,489.

Figure 1
Weekend and Weekday Jitney Ridership for May and June, 1995.



Source: Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, 1997

All of the above mentioned indicators had a positive percent change (see Table 1). It is possible that the contractor did not fully understand the nature of the public transportation industry by adding more vehicles to the corridor and by increasing the number of trips and miles traveled without creating a sufficient ridership base. Even though ridership increased, the cost to operate multiple vehicles outweighed the fares and the subsidies provided by Houston METRO.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Interview with Mr. Jim DePitts, August 15, 1997.

Table 1
Jitney Ridership Information,
May and June 1995

	May 1995	June 1995	Increase/ Decrease	Percent Change	Average
total number of trips	1,586	2,706	1,120	41%	2,146
Total number of hours operated	835.5	1,348	512.5	38%	1,092
Total miles	12,707	21,489	8,782	41%	17,098
Total number of weekday riders	1,011	4,685	3,674	78%	2,848
Total number of weekend riders	269	725	456	63%	497

Source: Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, 1997

The next contractor selected for the FasTrak⁴¹ program chose the nearly eight mile corridor along Bellaire street between the Bellaire Transit Center west to Dairy Ashford or Cook roads. The evaluation will first focus on a survey administered by Houston METRO, published in June 1997.⁴²

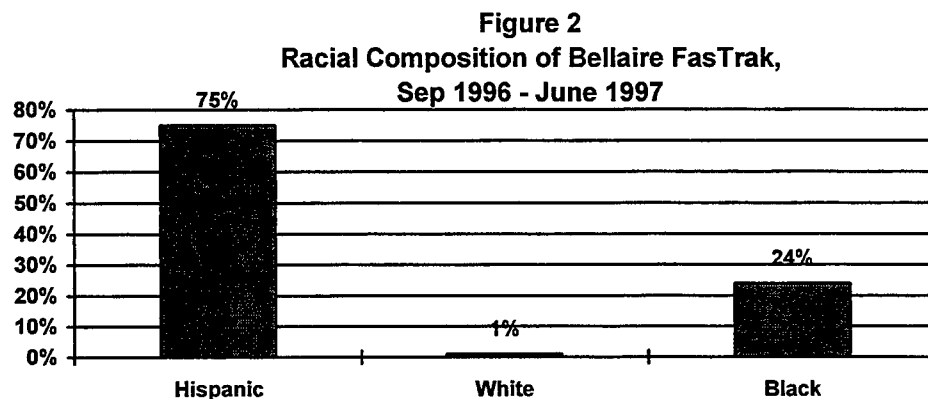
FasTrak Survey Results

The consensus among the FasTrak patrons is that the present service is satisfactory, but extension of the service corridor to the Medical Center area

⁴¹ FasTrak is the name of the jitney program as sponsored by Houston METRO.

would enhance the attractiveness of the FasTrak. The survey findings also indicate "...the majority of FasTrak customers are of Hispanic origin and are Spanish language dominant. About three in four FasTrak customers are Hispanic...".⁴³ The report further describes the subsidy provided the FasTrak operator to be \$50 per vehicle, which must operate a minimum of six hours a day.⁴⁴

A majority of the FasTrak patrons are female (56 percent), and the ethnicity of the patrons indicates that 74 percent are Hispanic, 25 percent African-American, and one percent Anglo (Figure 2). The FasTrak customers' average age is 24 and generally comes from households classified as *low income*.



Source: Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, June 1997

⁴² The survey results are presented in the report "Southwest Corridor Services Survey", which also presents survey findings for the 402 Bellaire, and the 404 Beechnut Flyer.

⁴³ Houston METRO, "Southwest Corridor Services Survey Findings", p 10, June 1997.

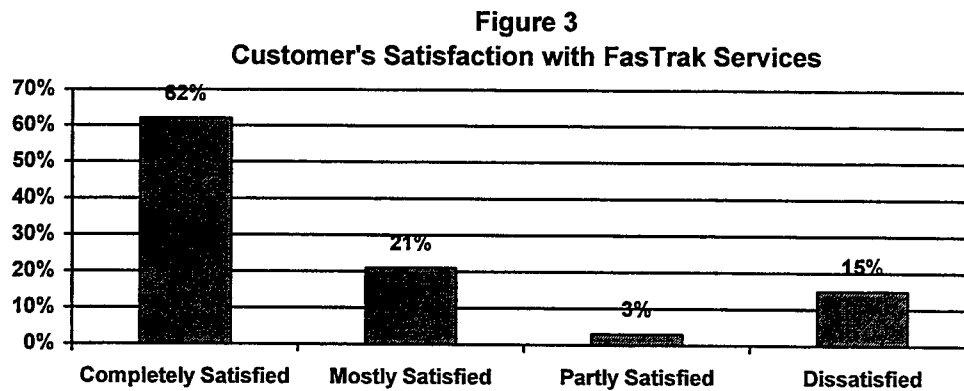
⁴⁴ The current FasTrak operator utilizes a maximum of two vehicles. Although on some days during the period of September to July 1997 there were days when only one vehicle was operating.

When asked if they were satisfied, or dissatisfied, with the current FasTrak service, a majority of the FasTrak customers (62 percent) were *completely satisfied* (Figure 3). This compares very favorably to customers who utilize the regular systemwide Houston METRO service routes, where only 24 percent were *completely satisfied*. However, more customers were *dissatisfied* with FasTrak service (15 percent) than with Houston METRO's system as a whole (4 percent).

The survey respondents further stated that the FasTrak service is preferred over regular bus service, but if FasTrak were not available one-half of the respondents would use the existing bus service.⁴⁵ Furthermore, questions concerning origins and destinations indicate the greatest majority (13 percent) destined for the Texas Medical Center area, while 14 percent of the trips originated near the intersection of Bellaire and Cook roads. The remainder of the FasTrak customers boarded along the corridor. The survey report states: "Eight in ten (FasTrak) customers walked to the FasTrak stop. The remainder transfer from another METRO bus to the stop, of which slightly less than half (42%) transfer from the 2 Bellaire. After alighting FasTrak, almost eight in ten (79%) reported they walk to their final destination."⁴⁶ As a final comment on the survey, 46 percent of FasTrak customers would like to see the existing service extended to include the Texas Medical Center area.

⁴⁵ 82% of the current FasTrak patrons would use the 2 Bellaire if the service suddenly became unavailable.

⁴⁶ Houston METRO, "Southwest Corridor Services Survey Findings", p 14, June 1997.



Source: Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, 1997

FasTrak Data Analysis

Houston METRO provided the FasTrak data from the monthly logs provided to them by the FasTrak contractor and spans the period September 1996 to July 1997. By analyzing the first five months of the reporting period (September 1996 to January 1997) separately from the remaining six months (February 1997 to July 1997) a distinctive pattern begins to emerge. The variables under consideration include total ridership, total number of trips, and total number of hours operated.

Service was provided an average of 27 days each month with a total ridership (weekday and weekend) of 45,595. The average monthly weekday ridership was 3,405 and the average monthly weekend ridership was 904. During the first five months of service, September 1996 to January 1997, the total weekday ridership was 12,891. From February to July 1997, the total weekday ridership was 24,569, an increase of nearly 48 percent. The same pattern holds true for weekend service. The period September 1996 to January 1997 indicates a total weekend ridership of 2,379. The weekend ridership for February to July 1997 was 5,756, an increase of 59 percent.

There were 9,112 total trips made during the entire reporting period. During September to January 1997, the total number of trips made equaled 2,379 with an average ridership per trip of four, compared to 5,756 trips for February to July 1997 with an average ridership per trip of six. Again, increases were realized from the periods September through January to February through July: 33.3 percent for average ridership per trip, and 25 percent for total ridership.

The total number of hours jitney service was provided was 4,054.⁴⁷ The average total number of hours operated per month was 405. However, for the period September through January the hours operated totaled 379 with an average ridership of eight per hour, compared to 432 hours for the period February through July, with an average ridership of six per hour.

⁴⁷ The total number of hours operated was unavailable for the month of April 1997. Therefore, all calculations using total number of hours is with a multiplier of 10 for the period September 1996 through July 1997.

The implications of this analysis indicates that all the variables identified for examination experienced positive increases during the last six months of the total reporting period. This is consistent with most business operations, as customers become aware and familiar with a service or product increases in sales occur over time. In this particular instance, as the customers became more aware of the jitney operations and the service provided, significant increases were realized in average monthly weekday ridership (48%), and average monthly weekend ridership (59%).

However, only modest increases were observed for average monthly hours of operations (12%), and average monthly trips (10%). This is consistent with the fact that the average monthly ridership per trip and average monthly ridership per hour both increased by 33 percent.

Jitney-type Transportation Nationwide

Jitneys as a major transportation system has not existed in this country since the 1920s. However, jitneys have found a particular niche in many small user markets. In Norfolk, Virginia, the Norfolk Senior Center operates a jitney for the benefit of its residences.⁴⁸ The Center makes it perfectly clear in its internet homepage that this service is not public transportation. In Palo Alto, the citizens were aggressively urging the city council to evaluate the possibility of establishing jitney services in the downtown area. The goal was to reduce

⁴⁸ ___ (no date), Norfolk Senior Center homepage, <<http://www.communitylink.org/senior/jitney.html>>, February 25, 1997.

parking and traffic congestion, in addition to increasing the city's desired "European flavor".⁴⁹

In 1987 the US Department of Transportation sponsored a study on the uses of private sector transportation providers in different communities and their applicabilities in non-urban areas.⁵⁰ All of the private contractors in these cities were subsidized with Section 18 funds from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA).⁵¹ The findings from this study include the following:

1. Local officials were very supportive of the inclusion of private contractors into the public transportation arena, pointing out the flexibility of the contractors to adjust to market conditions. Also, the very nature of private business leads the officials to believe that in some instances, private business may be able to more efficiently serve the community than a public agency.
2. The use of private contractors reduces the need for extensive capital outlays in maintenance and equipment.
3. The need for an expanded public sector employment and the associated "bureaucratic red tape" are reduced with increased involvement of the private sector.

⁴⁹ Peter Gauvin, "Land Use: Palo Altans Want Jitneys, Calmer Streets" (March 3, 1995), February 25, 1997. <http://www.sérvice.com/PAW/morgue/news/1995_Mar_3.COMPPLAN.html>, February 25, 1997.

⁵⁰ The communities that were the subject of the case studies included Canon City, CO, Rio Grande, NJ, West Chester, PA, Chicago IL, Hilo, HI, Lawrence, KS, Bakersfield, CA, and Clinton, NC.

⁵¹ UMTA was renamed the Federal Transit Authority (FTA).

Other findings indicate the acceptance of private involvement by area leaders due to the levels of mobility in the region and the reported satisfaction of the transportation customers. While this study implies that private contractors have a place in the public transportation business, three of the communities identified used the contractors in a solely demand responsive manner, three used a combination of fixed route and demand responsive, and of the remaining two, one used a subsidized taxi and the other was strictly fixed route.⁵² The primary similarity between the contractors in the above study and the jitney services as currently operated in Houston, is that the above contractors also received some form of subsidy. The contractors in the UMTA study operated in urban, rural and a mix of the two, while successfully integrating transportation services into an effective system.

⁵² Demand responsive service is similar to a taxi service in that the customer either notifies the contractor before needed transportation service or calls on an as needed basis. The routes are not fixed nor do they operate on a specific schedule. For example, in Canon City, Colorado, the contractor operated a subsidized taxi service.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Public transportation has faced many challenges in meeting the mobility needs of communities across the nation. Still, many feel as though they have “fallen through the cracks” of public transit for any number of reasons. Jitneys do not appear ready to challenge the bus for dominance in public transit, however, there are a number of situations where jitneys may augment bus or rail transit either as a public service or private venture.

Additional studies have indicated that certain groups in a city’s, or region’s, population may be more inclined to benefit from the specialized service provided by jitneys, or transportation services that behave similar to jitneys. For example, college or university campuses located in rural areas where normal public transit is not economically feasible, but still needed to provide transportation for students derive great benefits from jitney-type transportation systems.

Certain corridors in urban areas that are predominately minority in demographic composition are definitely potential areas for jitneys. Some minorities may feel more comfortable in the intimate environment offered by the jitney versus the interaction of the regular bus service. The extent to which language barriers contribute to the decision to use public transit or not, has yet to be determined. However, there seems to be a strong relationship between minority jitney operators and minority passengers.

The Houston METRO supported FasTrak appears to be operating successfully within its given corridor. From a business perspective, the operator is avoiding the pitfalls which led to the demise of the original route along the Westheimer corridor. Additional findings from the Bellaire corridor include:

- A majority of the users of FasTrak are of minority descent (74% Hispanic, and 25% African-American).
- The service has gained ridership over the last six months (59% increase), while only making minimal increases over the last six months in the average monthly total hours of operations (12% increase) and the average monthly total trips made (10% increase).
- 56 percent of the FasTrak patrons are women, average age of 24, and from households classified as *low income*.
- 62 percent of the FasTrak patrons were *completely satisfied* with the current service.
- The greatest majority (13%) of FasTrak users list their destination as the Texas Medical Center.

After evaluation of the existing data and the positive increase in ridership during the reporting period, the current jitney/FasTrak service is providing the desired levels of increased mobility. But can this service be extended into sparsely populated rural areas? The examination of current

jitney-type services indicate a commonality of minimal trip distances, generally three to five miles, with a major terminus, such as a park and ride facility or employment center, as a connector to existing public transit service. In none of the existing studies does jitney services replace an existing public transit route(s), but instead is used as an augmentation device.

The possibility of contracting with an existing taxi service is also an option in rural and non-urban as well as suburban areas. If the regional transit authority, or regional council of governments, is capable of providing some form of subsidy to a taxi company, one or two taxis dedicated to daily jitney services would probably cause minimal disruption to the normal taxi business. This may be the preferred option in rural areas. However, a pilot project should be initiated to determine its full potential and develop criteria and measures for successfulness.

The Center for Transportation Training and Research (CTTR) at Texas Southern University has operated a jitney-type vanpool service for the residents of the Cuney Homes, a low income housing area located southeast of Houston's CBD. Supported by a grant from the FTA, this vanpool operates on a semi-fixed route several times each weekday. While not available to the general public, the residents of this housing project have benefited greatly from the increased access to grocery stores and medical facilities.

With the new welfare-to-work initiative, the subsidies may come from the federal government as the current administration is committed to transitioning former welfare recipients into the world of work. In a September

3, 1997, press release, Vice President Al Gore announced \$1.1 billion in funding earmarked for new welfare-to-work grants initiative. The Vice President stated:

It is \$1.1 billion that can be used to create and subsidize jobs for those who have been on welfare; for on-the-job training and job placement; for support services to keep people in their jobs; and for additional childcare and transportation. These funds help give states and local authorities the additional resources they need to help welfare recipients do what they most want to do--work.⁵³

There are potentially several uses of jitney services in rural and non-urban areas, either as a private venture for a select clientele, or as a subsidized public service in a specified corridor. In an age when mobility has become a concern in presidential political issues, it is time for local policies to reflect similar commitments to the mobility of those who need it the most.

⁵³ The White House, Office of the Vice President, press release September 3, 1997, (October 3, 1997), <http://wtw.doleta.gov/vicepres.html>

Bibliography

- Barger, Harold**, The Transportation Industries, 1889-1946: A Study of Output Employment, and Productivity, National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc, 1951.
- Dressman, Frances**, "'Yes, We Have No Jitneys!': Transportation Issues in Houston's Black Community, 1914-1924", The Houston Review, Pp 69-81.
- Foster, Mark S.**, From Streetcar to Superhighway: American City Planners and Urban Transportation, 1900-1940, Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1981.
- Hilton, George W.**, The Cable Car in America, Howell North Books: Berkeley, California, 1971.
- The Houston Chronicle**: January 18, 1924.
- The Houston Informer**: November 11, 1922; January 6, 1923; June 2, 1923; June 9, 1923; December 15, 1923; December 22, 1923; December 29, 1923; January 5, 1924; January 12, 1924; January 19, 1924; January 26, 1924.
- The Houston Press**: September 4, 1922; November 2, 1922; November 11, 1922.
- The Literary Digest**, "The Jitneys", February 13, 1915, Pp 302-3.
- The Literary Digest**, "The Growth of the 'Jitney' Bus Business", February 27, 1915, Pp 434-5.
- The Nation**, "The 'Jitney Bus'", February 4, 1915, p 142.
- The Outlook**, "The Jitney Invasion", April 14, 1995, Pp 854-5.
- McComb, David G.**, Houston: The Bayou City, University of Texas Press: Austin and London, 1969.
- Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County**, *Southwest Corridor Services Survey Findings*, June 1997

Papademetriou, Peter C., Transportation and Urban Development in Houston, 1830-1980, Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, 1982.

Platt, Harold L., City Building in the New South: The Growth of Public Services in Houston, TX, 1830-1910, Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1983.

Strong, Sydney, "A Nickel a Ride-When The Jitney Comes to Town", The Survey, March 13, 1915, Pp 647-8.